



First Baptist Church At The Villages

Discipleship Group Lesson

Series: Under Authority | Title: Seasons of Trust | Main Passage: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

for use by groups 5/13 - 5/18/2019

Main Point

We can embrace every season of life, trusting God to use it to make us more like Christ.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What was the last thing to disrupt the regular flow of your life in either a positive or a negative way? How did you feel? How did you react?

What are some of the blessings you have experienced as a result of the changing seasons of life?

Solomon, in Ecclesiastes 3, meditates on the complex nature of life in a fallen world and concludes, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” (v. 1). This tells us that while we may struggle to make sense of the season of life we are in, our current circumstances are not a surprise to God. In today’s study, we will discover how we can trust God has a purpose for the season of life we find ourselves in.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15.

Solomon begins this section of Ecclesiastes by reminding his readers that there is “a time to be born and a time to die” (v. 2). Why is it important for us to be aware of this?

By beginning this section of Ecclesiastes with a reminder that there is “a time to die,” Solomon reminds us that we are mortal and our time here on earth is limited. Before sin entered the world, there was no death. Thus Solomon reminds us that we are broken people living in a broken world. The apostle Paul understood this as well and challenged the church at Ephesus to “look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16).

What do the contrasting times Solomon mentions in verses 2-8 teach us about the nature of life?

Which phrase from verses 2-8 stands out to you the most? Why?

Many of these contrasting times highlight the limitations of human nature. Why is it important for us, as Christians, to be mindful of our human limitations?

Life is composed of joy and sorrow, building and destroying, and living and dying. Each comes at the proper time. This reminds us that we are creatures of time and not yet able to partake of the joys of eternity. No one can be happy who has not come to grips with the reality that life is full of changes and sorrows as well as continuity and joy. We must accept that we are mortal and governed by time. Realizing our human limitations reminds us that we are dependent upon God for everything. As Christians, recognizing our limitations should not cause us to despair but to run to Christ.

Why might God allow us to go through difficult times? What is God teaching us in such situations?

| Have a volunteer read 1 Peter 1:3-9.

What does Peter say brings great joy (see vv. 3-5)?

Trials and difficulties can be a blessing because they often force us to cut ties with the things of the world and run to Christ. When we face trying times, God challenges us to consider where we have been turning for hope and joy. In these moments, believers will turn to Christ to strengthen their faith and deepen the joy they have in Him.

Peter indicates in verse 7 that God has a plan for the trials that He lets believers face. What is that plan? What is God doing in believers as He lets them face trials?

How might trusting Christ in the midst of trials result in “inexpressible and glorious joy” (v. 8)? What does that trust look like?

Peter says that trials show the proven character of your faith. He compares trials to purifying gold in a furnace. To make higher quality gold, a craftsman would heat the gold in a furnace so that the impurities would rise to the surface and the craftsman could remove them to make the gold more precious and valuable. In other words, God allows us to go through trials in order to draw us closer to Himself and so that Christ would become increasingly more valuable to us.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What was the most difficult season of life you have gone through? What made it so difficult? Looking back, what did you learn from that experience?

What difficult situations and circumstances are you or your family currently facing? How might God be using that situation to strengthen your faith and deepen your relationship with Him?

How might studying God's Word help you learn to embrace the season of life you are in and learn from it? How can our group help each other spend time in God's Word this week?

What is one step you can take toward trusting God this week?

Who do you know who needs to be reminded that God is in control and has a purpose for their lives? How might you encourage them to trust Christ in the midst of their difficulties this week?

Pray

Thank God for demonstrating His love so boldly and freely by giving up His Son on the cross for our sins. Pray that the Lord would help us to trust that He is constantly working for our good, even in the midst of trials and difficulties. Ask God to help us testify of His goodness and mercy no matter what season of life we find ourselves in.

Commentary

| Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

3:1-11. These verses, the most famous text in Ecclesiastes, must be read from the context of the fundamental claim of the book: that we are mortals, doomed to perish, and that our work will perish with us. No human work is eternal, and our activities, whether building or tearing down, must change as the situation dictates.

We naturally prefer to stay on the positive side of the list—to laugh rather than to weep, to love rather than to hate, and to have peace rather than war—but as long as we live in a world of change, conflict, and death, we must accept the fact that we cannot have unchanging bliss. Even so, as verse 11 says, everything is “appropriate in its time.” Mourning and separation are painful, but there is a time when it is right and even beautiful to mourn. We must accept the fundamental fact of mortality: we are creatures who live in time. We must respond appropriately to the seasons of life as they come.

3:5. The meaning of throwing or gathering stones is uncertain. It may refer to clearing a field for planting versus building a wall, or spoiling a field (2 Kings 3:25) versus clearing it (Isa. 5:2). A rabbinical tradition takes it to be a euphemism for participating in or refraining from sexual relations.

3:11. The fact that God has also put eternity in their hearts tells us that although we are creatures of time, we are not like the animals, who are fully and exclusively creatures of time. God made us as hybrids, so to speak, in that we are temporal but we have an inner longing for eternity. We can never be fully at peace in this life because, although we are mortal, we yearn for immortality.

3:12-14. The fact that we are creatures of time is another reason to enjoy the days we have. Giving ourselves to excessive mourning and toil is as wrong as indulging in excessive laughter and dancing.

3:15. The phrase God repeats what has passed is literally, “God seeks the pursued” or “God seeks the persecuted.” Such a translation suggests that God cares about and seeks out those who are harassed and oppressed. This anticipates the text on injustice that follows (vv. 16-17).